

**2013 Award for Outstanding Preservation Rehabilitation Project**

**Babcock Theater Building (Billings)**

**By**

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The 2013 Preservation Award for Outstanding Historic Rehabilitation Project is presented to the Babcock Theater Building in Billings.

The rehabilitation of the 1907 Babcock Theater Building is the handiwork of owners Kay Foster, Mike Mathew and Don and Kim Olsen of O2 Architects. Their work on the Babcock Theater Building benefits Billings not only historically --- but also aesthetically, commercially, and culturally.

The Chicago Style commercial building, designed by renowned Seattle architect Edwin W. Houghton, was one of the preeminent theater houses between the Midwest and West Coast when it opened in 1907. The massive primarily two-story tall building occupies an entire quarter block. It is comprised of ground floor retail with glass storefronts separated by cast stone-covered columns, topped with brick faced second floor apartments and anchored by a 760 seat theater along the west side. The north and east elevations, which front the major intersection of North 28<sup>th</sup> Street and 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue in downtown Billings, are each comprised of

nine bays. Each side displays a narrow arched bay at the center flanked by three wider bays followed by narrow bays at the ends.

A large illuminated 1950s marquee projects out over the sidewalk and dominates the north side of the building. Below the marquee sits a deeply recessed entry and ornate ticket booth.

Constructed as an opera house, the theater evolved with the times transitioning from stage performances, to silent films, and ultimately to “talkies” through the rise and fall of the grand movie palace. Its final iteration and what we see today is an excellent example of the Skouras-Style theatre design, a design often described as streamline modern, expressing “showmanship” in architecture. It is one of the last theaters done in this style and one of the few examples outside of California.

The rehabilitation of the Babcock Theater Building is an excellent example of what we believe a sensitive rehabilitation should include: a continuation of the building’s historic functions, preservation of its character, and modifications for the present that are as much in line with the building’s architecture as they are with modern circumstances. These ideals only become reality through dedicated building stewards such as Kay Foster, Mike Mathew and Don and Kim Olsen. It is with great appreciation that we present this award to them for their preservation of the Babcock Theater Building in Billings.